

The Feasibility of Establishing a Religious Studies Program that Offers Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees at Texas Southern University

**A Report to the Texas Legislature,
Per House Bill 981, 87th Texas Legislature**

July 2022

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Agency Mission

The mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is to provide leadership and coordination for Texas higher education and to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency through *60x30TX*, resulting in a globally competitive workforce that positions Texas as an international leader.

Agency Vision

The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The THECB's core values are:

Accountability: We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

Efficiency: We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

Collaboration: We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

Excellence: We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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Executive Summary

The state's updated higher education strategic plan, *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, expands on the successes and progress of the previous plan, *60x30TX*, by widening the lens for higher education. The plan focuses on three measurable, data-driven goals: 1) attainment of postsecondary credentials; 2) postsecondary credentials of value; and 3) research, development, and innovation. The target for the first goal is that 60% of Texans ages 25-64 will receive a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary credential of value by 2030. Whereas *60x30TX* focused on 25-34-year-olds, we are expanding our commitment to serve all working-age Texans (THECB, 2022). The type of degree students complete is equally important. Research indicates that completing a credential or degree beyond a high school diploma improves employment outcomes and earnings for individuals (Belfield, 2017).

House Bill (HB) 981, 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, required the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a religious studies program that offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees at Texas Southern University (TSU). The bill directed that not later than December 1, 2022, the THECB shall submit to each legislative standing committee with primary jurisdiction over higher education and the board of regents of Texas Southern University (TSU) a report on the results of the study. This report satisfies that legislative directive.

The THECB collaborated with TSU during the entire process of the study to ensure it captured the mission, goals, and objectives of TSU, as well as the intent of the legislation.

Currently, there are 20 public and private institutions that offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in religious studies in Texas with the CIP code 38.0201.00.

Recommendation

The THECB recommends TSU begin working on the planning notification for a new doctoral program in religious studies to begin the process of fulfilling HB 981. Once the doctorate program is approved and begins enrolling students, the THECB recommends TSU explore creating a religious studies program at the bachelor's and master's levels.

Introduction

The state's updated higher education strategic plan, *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, is entirely student-centered: Its overarching goal is that 60% of Texans ages 25-64 will receive a degree, certificate, or other postsecondary credential of value by 2030 (THECB 2022). The type of degree students complete is equally important. Research indicates that completing a credential or degree beyond a high school diploma improves employment outcomes and earnings for individuals (Belfield, 2017).

For Texas students, choosing the right postsecondary degree is necessary to ensure the state remains competitive at the national and international levels. As the Texas population continues to grow, the demand for qualified professionals with training in religious studies is expected to increase (TXST, 2020).

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates a national average of 20,300 openings for religious studies each year from 2019 to 2029, with an employment increase of 5%. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) indicates a state average of 1,640 annual job openings for religious studies each year from 2018 to 2028, with an employment increase of 11%. In 2021, Texas public and private institutions produced 716 graduates with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in religious studies. According to TWC's estimates, Texas is producing 924 fewer graduates than available job positions, indicating a shortage of graduates in the religious studies field.

House Bill 981

The 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, passed House Bill (HB) 981, which mandated the THECB to "conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a religious studies program that offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees at TSU." HB 981 directed the THECB to submit a report detailing the feasibility of establishing a religious studies program to each legislative standing committee with primary jurisdiction over higher education and the board of regents of TSU not later than December 1, 2022. This report satisfies that legislative directive.

Texas Southern University Background

Founded in 1927, Texas Southern University (TSU) is one of the nation's largest historically Black universities. TSU serves more than 7,000 students and offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs and concentrations, with a diverse faculty, 80-plus student organizations, and an extensive alumni network. The university's academic curriculum is organized into 10 colleges and schools on a 150-acre campus in Houston. Although initially established to educate African Americans, Texas Southern University has become one of the most diverse institutions in Texas.

TSU states its mission as: "Texas Southern University is a student-centered comprehensive doctoral university committed to ensuring equality, offering innovative programs that are responsive to its urban setting, and transforming diverse students into lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and creative leaders in their local, national, and global communities."(TSU, 2022)

History

Houston Colored Junior College (1927-1934) - "On September 14, 1927, the Houston Public School Board agreed to fund the development of two junior colleges: one for whites and one for Blacks. A loan was given from the Houston Public School Board of \$2,800, and the Colored Junior College was established in the summer of 1927 under the supervision of the Houston School District. The Colored Junior College was established to provide an opportunity for Blacks to receive college training. The Junior College progressed so fast that by 1931, it became a member of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and was approved by the Southern Association of Colleges" (TSU, 2021).

Houston College for Negroes (1934-1947) - "In the summer of 1934, the Houston School Board changed the junior college to a four-year college and the name to Houston College for Negroes. In 1936, sixty-three individuals became members of the first graduating class. In the summer of 1943, it formally added a graduate program. In the spring of 1945, the Houston Independent School District severed its relationship with Houston College for Negroes, and thereafter all management of the college was vested in a Separate Board of Regents" (TSU, 2021).

Texas State University for Negroes (1947-1951) – "In February of 1946, Heman Marion Sweatt, an African American Houston mail carrier, applied to enroll in the law school at the University of Texas. Since Texas was a segregated state, Sweatt was denied admission and later filed a suit against The University of Texas and the state of Texas with the support of the NAACP. In response, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 140 on March 3, 1947, providing for the establishment of a Negro law school in Houston and the creation of a university to surround it. This bill was complemented by House Bill 788, which approved \$2,000,000 to purchase a site near Houston to house this new college and support its operation. ... The intention of Senate Bill 140 and House Bill 788 was to create a new university for Negroes in Houston that would become the equivalent of The University of Texas in Austin." On June 14, 1947, the decision was made to house the law school at the Houston College for Negroes creating a new law school for Negroes of Texas and establishing Texas State University for Negroes (TSU, 2021).

Texas Southern University (1951-Present) - On June 1, 1951, the school's name was changed from Texas State University for Negroes to Texas Southern University after students petitioned the state legislature to remove the phrase "for Negroes." TSU was also named a special purpose institution for urban programming, and offers 49 undergraduate degrees, 25 master's degrees, seven research doctorates, and two professional doctorates (TSU, 2021).

Background of Religious Studies

What is Religious Studies?

A religious studies program “investigates the most basic components of human society and culture. The key to understanding the fundamental motivations for the behavior of human groups lies in the knowledge of religious beliefs and practices” (Allegheny College, 2022). University of Tennessee Chattanooga adds that, “The academic study of religion has a distinctive multidisciplinary character, drawing upon resources and approaches from archaeology, art, anthropology, history, literature, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. It also has a strong multicultural orientation, exploring a plurality of traditions and a wide range of behaviors and beliefs” (UT Chattanooga, 2022).

According to the American Academy of Religion, “The academic study of religion plays a crucial role in the mission of colleges and universities as they seek to form students into inquisitive and responsible leaders who become lifetime learners who can think critically. They provide spaces for students to explore the basic and essential questions facing humanity—questions that inform, intersect, and live alongside those pursued by colleagues in fields ranging from cognition and human behavior to applied medicine and international business. Religious studies courses prepare students to work across religious and cultural divides to meet the challenges of today’s global marketplace. Religious studies courses help students to better understand themselves and others, to think creatively and critically, and to read and write carefully” (American Academy of Religion, 2020).

Religious studies can lead students in many directions. Students can choose to make religion the center of their professional career in roles such as the leader of a religious community or as an academic professional in higher education, or they can choose to further their study in non-religious disciplines, such as law, business, education, or medicine (UT Chattanooga, 2022).

Common Career Fields for Religious Studies

Below are some common careers in the religious studies field:

- Counselor
- Diplomat
- Journalist
- Religious Leader
- Social Worker
- Theologian
- Business (particularly international business)
- Education
- Law
- Medicine

Current Programs in Texas

Currently, there are 42 institutions in Texas that offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in religious studies.

Public Institutions:

Texas State University, BA in Religious Studies
The University of Texas at Austin, BA, MA, and PhD in Religious Studies
University of Houston, BA in Religious Studies
University of North Texas, BA in Religion

Private Institutions:

Abilene Christian University, MA in Ancient and Oriental Christianity, MA in Modern and American Christianity, BA in Bible and Ministry, MA in Old Testament, New Testament, MA in Global Service
Austin College, BA in Religion
Baylor University, BA, MA, and PhD in Religion
Criswell College, BA in Biblical Studies, MA in Christian Studies
Dallas Baptist University, BA in Biblical Studies, BA/MA in Intercultural Studies (Missions), MA in Children's Ministry
East Texas Baptist University, BA, MA in Christian Ministry, BA in Religion, BA in Religion/Biblical Studies, BA/MA in Religion/Missions Concentration, BA in Religion/Pastoral Ministry Concentration, BA in Religion/Children Discipleship, BA in Religion/Youth Discipleship
Hardin-Simmons University, BA in Biblical Studies, MA in Religion, MA in Family Ministry, BA in Youth Ministry
Howard Payne University, BA in Bible, BA in Christian Studies, BA/MA in Youth Ministry
Houston Baptist University, BA in Christianity
Jarvis Christian College, BA in Religion
LeTourneau University, BA in Biblical Studies
Lubbock Christian University, BA in Biblical Text and Preaching, BA in Missions, BA in Youth and Family Ministry
McMurry University, BA in Christian Ministry and BA in Religion
Our Lady of The Lake University of San Antonio, BA in Theology and Spiritual Action
Rice University, BA, MA, and PhD in Religion
Saint Edward's University, BA in Catholic Studies
Schreiner University, BA in Religion
Southern Methodist University, BA, MA, and PhD in Religious Studies
Southwestern Adventist University, BA in Religion
Southwestern Assemblies of God University, BA/MA in Bible and Theology, MA in Biblical Studies, BA/MA in Intercultural Studies, MA Children and Family
Southwestern University, BA in Religion
Texas Christian University, BA in Religion
Texas Wesleyan University, BA in Religion
Trinity University, BA in Religion
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, BA in Christian Studies, BA in Christian Ministry
University of the Incarnate Word, BA/MA in Religious Studies, BA/MA in Pastoral Ministry/Philosophy
University of St. Thomas, MA in Pastoral Studies
Wayland Baptist University, BA/MA in Christian Ministry, BA/MA in Religion, and BA in Religion Composite, BA in Intercultural Missions
Wiley College, BA in Religion

Other Institutions Authorized by Certificate

Arlington Baptist University, BA in Inter-cultural Studies, BA in Pastoral Ministry, BA in Children's Ministry, BA in Student's Ministry
Baptist University of Americas-San Antonio, BA in Bible-Theological Studies
B.H. Carroll Theological Institute, MA in Religion
Dallas Christian College, BA in Biblical Ministry, BA in Practical Ministries and Bible, BA in Worship Arts and Bible
Messenger College, BA in Christian Ministry
Paul Quinn College, BA in Religious Studies
Seminary of the Southwest, MA in Spiritual Formation

In addition, three of the institutions offering degrees in Religious Studies are located in Houston, near the Texas Southern University campus: University of St. Thomas (2.4 miles from TSU), Rice University (3.2 miles from TSU), and Houston Baptist University (11.9 miles from TSU).

National Workforce Need

The need for religious studies jobs nationwide is not being met with current production. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates 20,300 openings for religious studies jobs each year between 2019 and 2029. Nationwide, institutions are producing an estimated 10,108 fewer graduates than available jobs, which puts the supply of religious studies graduates at a shortage.

Table 1. Workforce Projections for Religious Studies Jobs, U.S., 2019-2029

	2019 Base	2029 Projected	Percentage Change	Avg. Annual Openings due to Growth and Replacement
Directors, Religious Activities and Education	157,500	162,700	3%	17,700
Philosophy and Religion Teachers, Postsecondary	30,900	32,900	7%	2,600
Total Annual Openings				20,300
TOTAL Degrees Awarded 2021 (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate)				10,192

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, IPEDS

State Workforce Need

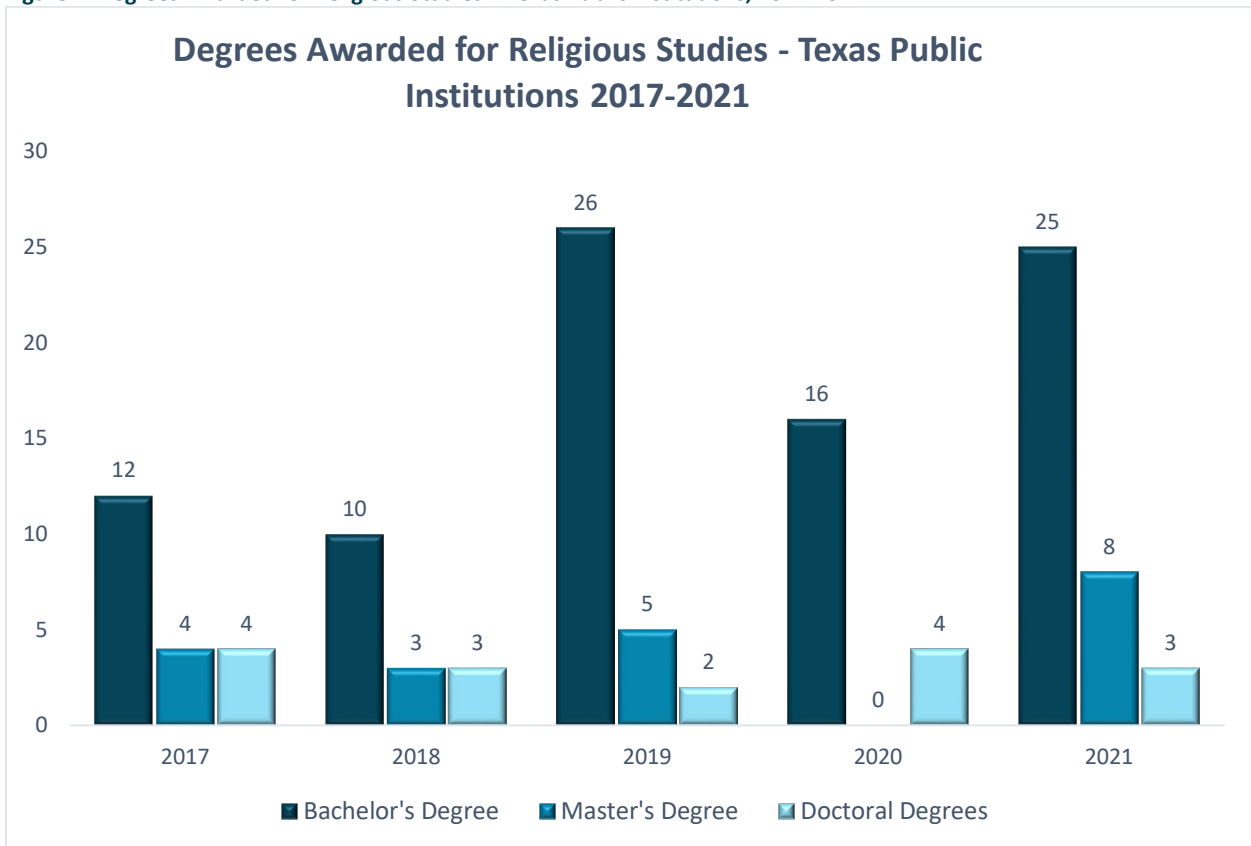
In 2021, Texas public and private institutions produced 465 graduates with a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in religious studies. For the decade 2018-2028, the TWC anticipates an average of 1,640 annual job openings for religious studies positions. According to TWC's estimates, Texas public institutions are producing an estimated 924 fewer graduates than available jobs, which puts the supply of religious studies graduates at a shortage. Based on this shortage, the current programs/graduates are not meeting the state's need in religious studies jobs.

Table 2. State Demand for Religious Studies Jobs, Texas, 2018-2028

	2018 Base	2028 Projected	Percentage Change	Avg. Annual Openings due to Growth and Replacement
Directors, Religious Activities and Education	10,510	11,700	11%	1,490
Philosophy and Religion Teachers, Postsec.	1,480	1,640	11%	150
Total Annual Openings				1,640
TOTAL Degrees Awarded 2021 (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate)				465

Source: TWC, THECB (Accountability)

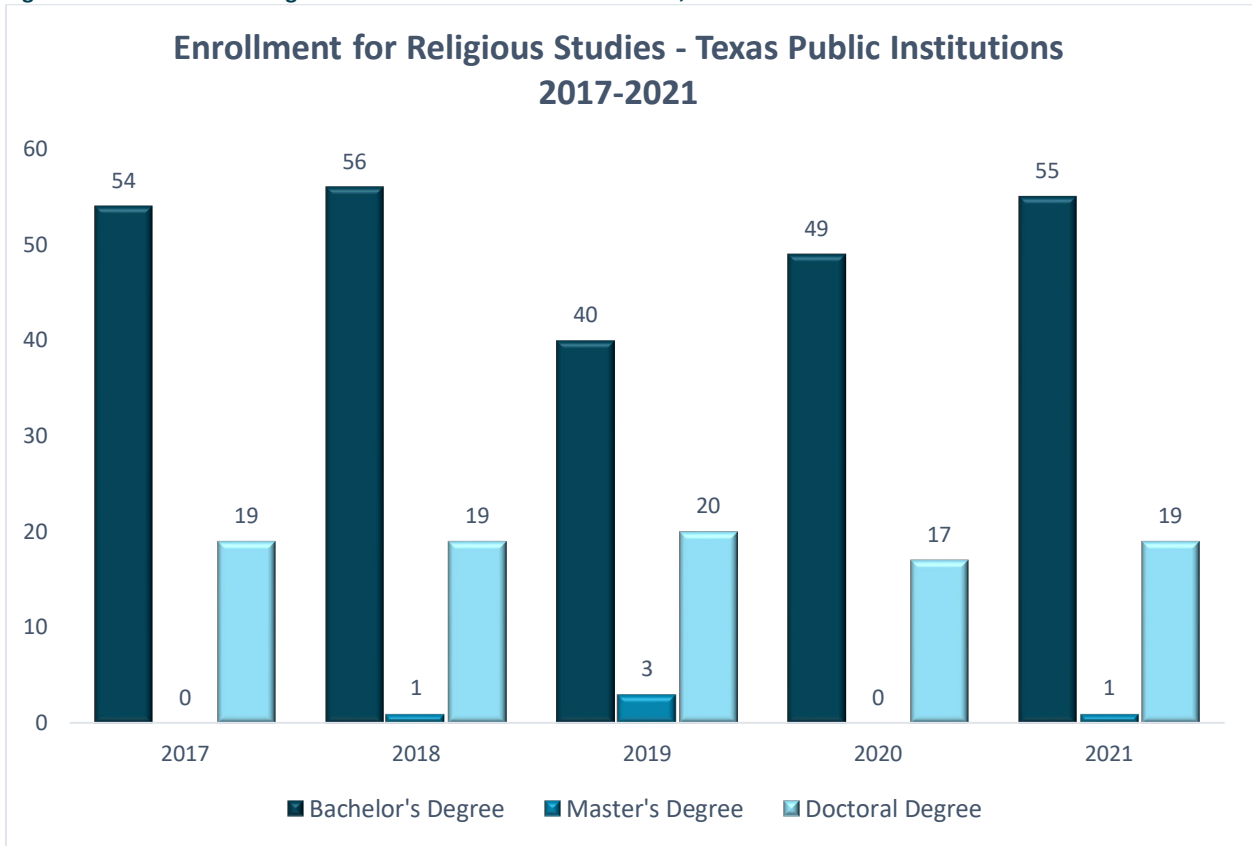
Figure 1. Degrees Awarded for Religious Studies – Texas Public Institutions, 2017-2021



Source: THECB Accountability, 2022

Based on THECB graduation data, there is a need for religious studies graduates based on available job openings and current graduate production in Texas.

Figure 2. Enrollment for Religious Studies – Texas Public Institutions, 2017-2021



Source: THECB Accountability, 2022

Enrollment has remained steady for religious students in Texas over the last five years. This indicates students will continue to enroll in the religious studies majors offered in Texas.

How to Request a New Degree Program in Texas

Below are instructions for requesting a new degree program in Texas with the THECB:

30-Day Notification Requirement for New Program Requests

Texas public institutions of higher education that want to propose a new degree or certificate program must first notify other public institutions of higher education within a 50-mile radius of the proposed location of the new program. The proposing institution may notify area institutions through a letter or email to the chief academic officers of the area institutions. The proposing institution must notify area institutions at least 30 days before submitting the proposal to the THECB.

If the proposing institution receives any objections, the institution must resolve those objections before submitting a proposal to the THECB. If the institution cannot resolve the objections, then it may ask the THECB to mediate the dispute. Once all objections have been resolved, the institution may submit the proposal to the THECB, along with documentation showing that notification was given to nearby public institutions and that the objections, if any, were resolved. These provisions are found in Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 5, Subchapter C, Rule 5.44 (a) (6) and (b) (3).

Notification of Planning

Texas public universities, health-related institutions, and junior colleges are authorized to offer approved programs, as reflected in their institution's [Program Inventory](#). An institution must submit planning notification before submitting a new program request for the following program types:

- Doctoral program in any discipline
- Engineering program at any level (including multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary engineering programs)
- Program with new costs likely to exceed \$2 million during the first five years
- Bachelor's program proposed by a Texas public junior college

An institution is considered by the THECB to be planning for a new degree program if it takes any action that leads to the preparation of a proposal for a new program. This includes hiring personnel, including consultants and planning deans, leasing and/or purchasing real estate, building facilities, and/or developing curriculum.

Planning notification must be submitted at least one year before an institution submits a proposal to offer a degree if the proposed program leads to the award of a "professional degree," as defined by Texas Education Code, Section 61.306, including Doctor of Medicine (MD), Doctor of Osteopathy (DO), Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS), Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), Juris Doctor (JD), and Bachelor of Laws (LLB).

Institutions submit planning notification through the [THECB's Document Submission Portal](#) as a letter to the Assistant Commissioner of the Academic and Health Affairs Division. The letter should include the title, degree designation, CIP code of the program, the anticipated date of submission for the proposal, and a brief description of the program.

After submitting planning notification, the THECB may request an institution's leadership to address the board of the THECB at a regularly scheduled meeting to describe how the potential program would contribute to the state's higher education efficiency and effectiveness, while avoiding costly duplication in program offerings, faculties, and physical plants.

Final Report Updates

Texas Southern University (TSU) has submitted a planning notification to request a new doctoral program in fall 2022.

In response to House Bill 981, approved by the 87th Texas Legislature, TSU submitted a letter requesting planning authority to develop a graduate doctoral program entitled Doctor of Religion and Society, designating it as falling under CIP code 38.0201, Religion and Society.

The university would house the program in the College of Liberal Arts & Behavioral Sciences. The program would foster an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion in its social context, drawing on the disciplines of religion, history, sociology, music, and others. It would focus on the academic study of religion and prepare those seeking or having employment in faith-based institutions for career advancement.

It would include options for subfields in business practices, technology, social work, communication, or/and counseling. While the program would be non-denominational and include required work in comparative religion and world religious traditions, it would initially focus on African American religious traditions, as befits TSU's role as an historically Black university. The program would begin as a doctoral-only program, using distance learning (online) to reach potential students across the country. Individuals with previous post-graduate work and currently working in the field would be specifically recruited for enrollment.

The interdisciplinary nature of this proposed program and the graduate-level focus on African American religious traditions, combined with the online delivery modality, makes this a stand-alone program, unduplicated by any other in the state and perhaps the country.

The university anticipates completion of the proposal for the program by fall 2022 and anticipates enrolling the first students in 2023 with THECB approval. The university anticipates the annual cost of opening the program to be \$240,000, excluding student support.

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TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

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January 21, 2022

Request for Planning Authority for a Doctoral Degree in Religion and Society
Degree designation: Ph.D. in Religion and Society
C.I.P. Code: 38.0201 Religion/Religious Studies
Anticipated Submission Date: Spring 2022

In response to House Bill 981 approved by the 87th Legislature of the state of Texas, Texas Southern University (TSU) seeks planning authority to develop a graduate executive doctoral program entitled Doctor of Philosophy in Religion and Society designating it as falling under CIP code 38.0201, Religion and Society. The University will house the program in the College of Liberal Arts & Behavioral Sciences. The program will foster an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion in its social context drawing on the disciplines of religion, history, sociology, music, and others. It will focus on the academic study of religion and prepare those seeking or having employment in faith-based institutions for career advancement

It will include options for sub-fields in business practices, technology, social work, communication, or/and counseling. While the program will be non-denominational and include required work in comparative religion and world religious traditions, it will initially focus on African American religious traditions as befits TSU's role as an HBCU. The program will begin as a doctoral only program using distance learning to reach potential students across the country. Individuals with previous post-graduate work and currently working in the field will be specifically recruited for enrollment.

To our knowledge, the interdisciplinary nature of this program and the graduate level focus on African American religious traditions, combined with the online delivery modality makes this a stand-alone program, unduplicated by any other in the state and perhaps the country.

The University anticipates completion of the proposal for the program by the fall of 2022 and anticipates enrolling the first students in 2023 with Coordinating Board approval.

Sincerely,

Lillian B. Poats, Ed.D.

Acting Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Appendix B:
H.B. No. 0981

AN ACT

relating to a study by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board on the feasibility of establishing a religious studies program at Texas Southern University.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter C, Chapter 61, Education Code, is amended by adding Section 61.06695 to read as follows:

Sec. 61.06695. STUDY ON RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM AT TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY. (a) The board shall conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a religious studies program that offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees at Texas Southern University.

(b) Not later than December 1, 2022, the board shall submit to each legislative standing committee with primary jurisdiction over higher education and the board of regents of Texas Southern University a report on the results of the study.

(c) This section expires September 1, 2023.

SECTION 2. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2021.

Texas Higher Education

COORDINATING BOARD

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highered.texas.gov](http://highered.texas.gov).

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